Interview with Hannah Greeley Kaiser

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Foreign Service Spouse Series

HANNAH GREELEY KAISER

Interviewed by: Jewell Fenzi

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Q: This is Jewell Fenzi on Friday, December 4th, 1987. I am interviewing Hannah Kaiser (Mrs. Philip Kaiser) at her home. Mrs. Kaiser has served as wife of the ambassador to Senegal, Hungary, and Austria (and as wife of) the Deputy Chief of Mission in London. Today, I want to concentrate on her years in Senegal, one of the new countries in the early nineteen sixties.

KAISER: This is Hannah Greeley Kaiser, and I'm going to start with a very brief two sentences about my early life. I was born in Simsbury, Connecticut. My father and mother had just come back from spending six months in Munich, where my father had done some post-graduate medical work after they had lived for a year in Tilley's Island, Newfoundland, where father had been a kind of missionary doctor. There, with another doctor, he started a hospital for the fisher folk. There are fascinating stories about his taking care of sick people, going on snowshoes a hundred miles round trip in one famous case.

It was a very interesting time for my mother, who had graduated from Radcliffe and taught school in the Boston area, although she was from Milwaukee originally. She met my father, who was at Harvard in Cambridge, and had a very rich time there. She organized a class in literature for the fishermen's wives and she also started a Boy Scout troop. She tried to tackle the problem of what the women should really be eating besides fish, and I

remember one story about her serving ice cream for a children's birthday party and it didn't go down at all well. They didn't really dig in and eat it. They said, “Oh, it's so cold.” That's something they didn't need anymore of.

My mother wrote the Radcliffe hymn, which is still sung to this day and was sung at our middle son's graduation from Harvard when we were there, along with an oratorio sung by the chorus, which had been written by my great uncle, John K. Paine, after whom the music building at Harvard was named, as he was the first professor of music in an American university. So there we have the roots.

And I myself went to the University of Wisconsin in the Depression and had the good fortune to meet one called Philip Kaiser in Selig Pearlman's famous class in capitalism and socialism. I didn't date him very much then, but in the fullness of time, when I was doing a post-graduate course at Radcliffe in 1937-38, I got a letter from him.

At that point he was a Rhodes scholar at Balliol College, Oxford, and he proposed marriage. Well, I was rather astonished, because we hadn't had very many dates and we hadn't been corresponding. But it just happened that my grandfather died that winter and left me with a magnificent sum of $600, and I thought when I finished the course, I could have that completion of every girl's education...a trip abroad. And I would go and look the situation over. So that's what happened.

I was proposed to from Land's End to Glasgow where I capitulated. (laughs) Then I had another year in London, while Phil took his third year as a Rhodes scholar.I worked for Spanish Relief in a little office set up by the Labour Party League of Youth to raise money and clothes for the victims of the war against fascism in Spain. I had a very interesting time calling on M.P.'s (Ministers of Parliament) and getting them to give the odd £5 note. I also was responsible for calling on a few artists. I will never forget my call on Augustus John, who thought that instead of painting a rich woman's portrait, the sister of Peggy Guggenheim, he said,”Who wants to paint her? She's homely. I'd much rather paint you.”

And he indicated that he would prefer me in the nude! I got a little bit worried by that and I got out of there with my virginity intact, but I wasn't sure for a few minutes. (laughs)

Q: (laughs) But no Augustus John portrait?

KAISER: No Augustus John portrait. This interview took place only a week before we were married in Oxford, the day after Phil's last exam, when it was legal. (laughs) I mean, it was not legal for him to be married as a Rhodes scholar in those days.

So, in the fall we came back to Washington where Phil got a job in the Federal Reserve Board. After I established our little nest, I took a job as a social worker in the District of Columbia, which was about the only thing available, because it was still Depression days.I kept that until FDR's (President Franklin Delano Roosevelt) multiple agencies were spawned. First, I worked for the War Savings Staff and then I worked as a kind of propagandist and writer of pamphlets to get young people to invest in war savings bonds. Then I worked for OPA (Office of Price Administration) in Personnel, which was the field I was supposedly trained in from the course at Radcliffe. But I stopped that six weeks before the birth of our first son, Robert, who is now doing so well at the Washington Post as Assistant Managing Editor of National News.And, incidentally, Robert married a girl called Hannah, which I say is the greatest compliment he will ever pay me, because he met a girl called Hannah and he didn't run away, but stayed and courted and married.

But, to get back to the Foreign Service...Phil worked in Washington until his appointment. His last job here was Assistant Secretary of Labor under Truman, who took him out of the Civil Service to make that appointment. So ever since then, we have been dependent on a Democrat being in the White House.

Q: I remember at the Women's National Democratic Club when he was introduced that he had worked for every Democratic President since Roosevelt. I just wanted to get that on the record.

KAISER: Yes, that's righHe worked with Byron White for the Kennedy campaign, and out of that fact, he got his appointment from Kennedy as ambassador to Senegal in 1961. We were there for three years. It was a most interesting experience, because the French had been in Dakar first. You lived in comfort and you ate French food and the staffs knew how to cook French food. The climate, I always maintain, wasn't quite as bad as Washington, except that you had no seasons. But the humidity was no worse than Washington, and there was often a breeze more often than there is in Washington. We had the ocean walking distance from our front door, so I could swim twice a day if I wanted to, and this made an enormous difference, too.

In Senegal, I started out in this beautiful modern house to offer my services to the USIA, who wanted to have English classes for the Africans, who came and who didn't have the funds to employ an English teacher. So I did teach English. I did not teach Africans for very long, however, because they did get the funds to employ teachers themselves. I was sorry about that, but was able to teach afterwards the French women, whose husbands were stationed in Dakar either in private business or in a government capacity or were the wives of other diplomats. A group of about ten or twelve women gathered twice a week in the morning on the terrace of the [official] residence, and we talked English. After three years of this, they gave me this beautiful gold Lacoutre watch, which I wear with a great pleasure.

Q: That's lovely.

KAISER: And besides that, we did as much as we could to entertain Africans. The Senegalese are a very handsome people and very black and beautiful. It's amazing how after awhile you're thinking about an African and you don't see his color any more at all, because they are such delightful people. They are warm and they enjoyed very much coming to the embassy. We had a little trouble over dinner parties, because they wouldn't necessarily let you know for sure whether they were going to bring their wives or not. So

buffet style was often easier. But last minute changing of the table was also possible, and that happened not infrequently.

Q: Repeatedly, probably. (laughs)

KAISER: (laughs) Yes, you're right. And we also made a point of entertaining the local employees wherever we were. The local employees in the embassy are of enormous help. They know so many things about the city and the country that you live in that you lean on them for help and advice and just plain information. We were particularly happy to offer also movies to the children, as well as to the local employees. In fact, we invited Senegalese to come and see movies as often as we possibly could, because this was something that they could not get themselves. Movies were not shown in English much at all in Dakar. I think there was one theater, but in French primarily. If they wanted to learn English, of course, the movies were a big help. And for all the American employees, movies were important, being entertained so far from home.

Q: Was there a really large interest in learning English in Dakar at that time?

KAISER: Yes, I would say there was, but I can't remember how many hours of English were taught by the USIA. There was a consistent interest. There was no real anti-American feeling then. We were so impressed with their own lyc#e. Two of our boys went to the lyc#e. Our middle one, who is now a professor of history and has always written the language very well, as have all our sons really, was given a good deal of trouble by the English teacher, because he didn't speak according to her book on how it should go. The French had a very legal and regular attitude toward a very flexible language, and poor David was penalized for knowing more English than the teacher.

At this lyc#e, there were a dozen languages. Besides English and - of course, French was the language of the school - they had Greek and Latin and Arabic, German, Italian, Portuguese. I guess I've named most of them. Anyway, it was an extremely impressive number of languages for an African lyc#e. This was the influence of the French. The

education system was started by the French, and some of the members of the government had studied in France at the Sorbonne.

The President of the country, Senghor, was studying English even when we were there. We knew he could have talked English to us, but he wouldn't. His French was so clear that we could understand it very nicely. (L#opold-S#dar Senghor, a well known poet, philosopher, and college professor, became Senegal's first president when it became an independent republic in 1960.)

I'd had high school French before we went, and I enjoyed taking French classes while I was in Senegal so that my French grew. The class was run by the embassy and was extremely helpful for those wonderful books that the language section...what do you call it?

Q: The Foreign Service Institute?

KAISER: The Foreign Service Language Institute, yes, for the books it put out. And I remember in the early days, however, struggling hard at dinner parties to understand the French ladies' very fast conversation and thinking, after I had made this big effort and understood, “What was it all about? Was it worth all this effort?” (laughs) Social conversation doesn't seem quite that important sometimes.

Q: But social conversation is quite a different thing from giving your staff instructions.

KAISER: Oh, definitely. Very different, very different. I remember the first dinner party we gave. It had all been arranged for us by Pierre Graham, who was the political officer, I believe. He had decided on the forty most important citizens of Dakar for a dining room that was really basically set up for fourteen. So we had to have three tables in the dining room, because he had expected we could use outdoors, but the rainy season started just about that time and it was utterly out of the question to have it outdoors. So we had these three tables for forty people.

Here I was, brand new at the job, wondering what to serve and really kind of worried about whether the cook was understanding me. He was a tall, rather elegant man, who had been the cook under our predecessors. I should have had much more faith in him, but anyway, I decided to make meringues or “pinch pie”, as Irma Rombauer, the original Joy of Cooking editor calls them. I made three round, big meringues and put them in an air-conditioned room so they wouldn't wilt before the party. I explained to the cook they should be filled with mixed fruits and cream, but I said fill them with glac#, not “cr#me de glac#.” Well, “glac#" and “creme de glac#" are two rather different things.

When they came in, they were put down on the sideboard. I looked over and saw that they were suspiciously flat. They were supposed to be very much like a small mountain. So the DCM's wife and I got up and took those meringues back to the kitchen and in the speed of light threw out the ice cubes that were in them, while we saw the cook unmolding the ice cream.

It turned out the Portuguese laundress was helping that night and she knew what “glac#" was. It was ice. And I'm afraid the pecking order was such that this somewhat lighter Portuguese girl was allowed to make this mistake. The cook didn't interfere when he, of course, knew exactly what I wanted. We were able to save the dessert and serve it and all was well. But I've dined out on the story not a few times.

Q: (laughs) You say that Senghor insisted always on speaking French. Did you really develop any sort of relationship with him?

KAISER: Oh, yes. Phil was extremely good at developing a relationship with this very educated, cultivated man, who was known for his being a poet in the French language and also the originator of the idea of “negritude,” which means that the blacks have a special culture of their own. He'd written on it. He was a dear man. He's still alive. We're sorry that we haven't been able to see him recently and we know that the last five years sometime he has been here, but we didn't learn about it in time to track him down.

Q: He abdicated...that's not the word to use, but that's what he did?

KAISER: He's the only African up until then who was succeeded in a peaceful way. He resigned, let's say, in favor of a man, Abdou Diouf, who had been in his government. Senegal has done fairly well, but like all African countries, they have their problems of corruption and food shortages, but to a lesser extent than the countries that have made the newspaper on the subject of famine.

Q: How much of that do you attribute to his leadership? Quite a bit?

KAISER: Oh, yes. A few years ago, we saw a movie made in Senegal about the subject of corruption. There was corruption portrayed in the movie. The whole thing showed people having to grease the palm of people from whom they needed something, and it ended up with a kind of appeal for a different way of behavior. It was extremely interesting and a well done film. Wonderful pictures of markets and Africans and where they lived.

Africans are allowed to have four wives, I believe, the Moslems, and when we traveled...I remembered African women are rarely treated like western women. They are not sitting down at the table as hostesses. They are waiting on you. When we had a small dinner with a local African government official in the south of the country, a woman came in to serve us. The political type said, “This is my wife!” And pretty soon another woman came in and he said, “This is my wife!” Phil has always been fond of his punch line, “I'm Catholic, I only have two, instead of four.” (laughs)

Q: (laughs) Was there ever a question when an invitation was extended as to which wife of a government official might come?

KAISER: I'm sure there were, but I don't remember any. As a matter of fact, they usually only had one wife for public display.

Q: Display. And the others?

KAISER: They might have one who, for instance, knew French, and the other would only know her tribal language or several tribal languages. It's amazing what good linguists the Africans can be. I got to know a midwife and went out into the country with her. I always remember the poignant scene in a tiny, little concrete building that had been built for her in order to help her examine women in privacy...women who were pregnant or had just given birth.

One woman said she really needed a few stitches. She'd had a baby the week before, and Marie Tour# took her into this little concrete building and looked around and found one broken needle and an empty bottle of alcohol. She just told the woman to come back next week, but privately she said to me, “That part of a woman's anatomy heals very fast. By next week, she won't need any stitches, so it will be all right.” But this is a lovely, relaxed attitude and, in that case, I guess it worked out all right.

Q: She was a Senegalese midwife?

KAISER: Oh, yes, she was Senegalese. She was devoted, and the thing that made her so unusual was the fact that she did go out into the countryside to take care of people, because the pattern was becoming, “We'd rather work in the city. We don't want to work in the country.” It was extremely difficult to get new doctors to go to the country to make a living.

There was this large area that was a slum...the Medina...and the slum area was appallingly primitive with no plumbing and lots of sand (sighs) and no conveniences. They used kerosene lamps in some cases even. The Africans felt the cold very much. The most popular present I could give them was sweaters. To us, it wasn't all that cold, but they found it cold.

Q: Well, this time of year, it did get a bit nippy in Dakar though, didn't it?

KAISER: We could wear sweaters.

Q: Where we were (Sierra Leone), they were the same way. They'd complain about the cold and the dryness just about this time of year.

KAISER: Well, you know, it was perhaps like a crisp Fall day at the most. The countryside was relatively flat most parts, except in the south where we could have mild jungles. You had baobab trees dotting the countryside, which are very special trees, very unusual kind of mushroom-like silhouette on the horizon. We learned a certain amount about the flora and fauna, and our sons learned a certain amount about diplomacy.

I remember when Mamadou Dia challenged Senghor, tried to lead a coup, he was chased to the top floor of the Government Building which was eight stories high. (Mamadou Dia was Prime Minister, arrested for attempting to overthrow the president in 1962. Dia and others were tried, convicted, and imprisoned in 1963, at which time Senegal adopted a new constitution that gave the president executive authority and abolished the office prime minister.) Eventually he was captured with no bloodshed whatsoever and he was put in a rest house or a government entertaining house that was not far from our residence.

When our sons found that those soldiers were resting on our property, they were very indignant. This was American property! No Senegalese soldiers should be on American property! They needled my husband to do something about it fast. He succeeded in getting them off the property, but they were harmless really. They weren't about to shoot anybody up. The whole coup was managed with great skill. Mamadou Dia was sent off to an island, and I think he spent ten or fifteen years there. But he has since been released. Very civilized. Nice. What can I tell you?

My husband wasn't the first ambassador to Senegal. He was the second, I believe. A man called Villard was there, who had a Russian wife and who was there when (then Vice President Lyndon) Johnson came to celebrate Independence (in 1960).

Q: You must have left Robert (the eldest son) behind?

KAISER: Robert, at that point, was in prep school. He went from prep school to Yale, where he was when we were in London. He had one more year at prep school still when we were in London, but he would come out for holidays and get the flavor of it. But he didn't get nearly the experience that Charles and David did. David even tried to learn a little African language. He's a real little intellectual. He also got nephritis, because we had the little Nivicain pills to control malaria, and David wasn't taking his. We were unaware of the fact that he was fooling us, and he got malaria and had to spend about a month in bed. It didn't interfere a whole lot with his joy of living, because he started reading through the encyclopedia and learning more French and whatnot. He had a friend in a French professor at the University of Dakar, a marvelous man, that we were all very fond of. Mont# came to call on him. David was about twelve or thirteen at the time.

So we learned the importance of being sure everybody got his anti-malarial medicine. My husband had a lot of trouble with his health. He worked very hard, and when I look back now at pictures of him in those days, I'm shocked to realize that it came on so gradually at the time. I didn't realize how terrible he looked, but he got TB (tuberculosis), and he also had a bout of dysentery. When we came back, he spent six weeks at NIH (National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland) with a marvelous new medicine that stops TB. After only about two weeks there, they let him out by days. He'd come back at night and he was allowed even to swim in Governor (Averell) Harriman's pool in Georgetown, which was very pleasant. Nobody seemed to worry that they were going to get TB. He had a very small spot on one lung. Everybody gets TB growing up, I'm told by the doctor, and you show a healed lesion when you have a chest X-ray. But his healed lesion started to grow, and that's how they knew he had TB. He looked gaunt and drawn. We fixed him up in relatively short order, but he obviously was overdoing it, working a little too hard.

Q: I'm afraid I don't know the principal tribes of Senegal.

KAISER: Well, Wolof is the most numerous, and Tukuler is a very fancy one, and there are two others. I don't think I can produce the names quite that fast. (The six major tribes in Senegal are the l) Wolof, 2) Serer, 3) Peul, also called the Fulani or Fula, 4) Tukuler, 5) Diola, and 6) Mandingo.) I do remember that in our household help, we had two people who were Wolofs and then we got one who was not Tukuler and not Wolof...I can't think of the name, but anyway, he turned out to be a real troublemaker. The Wolof young man, who had been there longer, felt very insecure in this other person's presence. I remember he had a very fast motorcycle and he was more worldly wise than our Wolof friend. I really should never have, with hindsight, employed this other tribal member. It was a much more harmonious household if we had all from the same tribe. But I didn't realize it at the time. Once this other person joined the staff, it was awkward to try to get rid of him, but we did have to read him the riot act and tell him that he couldn't fight with other members of the staff.

We had a wonderful cook called Ibrahima after the first cook left, and Ibrahima had had a traveling job with a salesman and knew about ten African languages; just amazing. He needed some hospital attention, and the hospital was right near the embassy, but he absolutely refused to go. The hospital had a very bad reputation among the local Africans who felt you only went there to die. So he had to live with a hernia, which was very unfortunate and I felt very bad about it, but since there was no American hospital, I couldn't do anything for him. He kept on working just the same.

Q: After Washington and the interesting life you'd had before, did you find moments in Dakar when you really felt isolated, or were you just so busy and so caught up in everything...?

KAISER: I never minded being somewhat isolated. I'm basically a nature-lover. I'd go swimming or I'd take a walk. My husband and I have always walked a great deal. I remember, still, our evening walks when the sun was setting and how beautiful the sky was, entirely different from here, the kind of roseate pink over the whole sky. There

generally were enough clouds to make it a beautiful sunset and, of course, they didn't have the problem of pollution, so the sunsets were quite different from here - paler, pastel shades, not the brilliant colors that you often get in America.

I don't remember it (feeling isolated). For one thing, I had two sons, or at least one there, and I remember the youngest son going through a period where he put his arms around me at night and said, “Oh, Mother, I love you so much.” Well, how could a woman be unhappy in such a situation?

Q: (laughs) Impossible.

KAISER: I think he had to say it in order to start weaning himself from me, I really do.

Q: Isn't it nice that it came from him though — the beginning of the weaning?

KAISER: That's right, it was. Right.

Q: I'm looking at the chronology and I wonder when you came back from Senegal — you see, the only reference that I had is the Department of State Biographic Register — and after Senegal, you seem to have come back to Washington and then really not have gone out again until 1977 to Hungary.

KAISER: No, that's not true.

Q: It's not true?

KAISER: There's one little story I want to add about Senegal. After the first year, I took David and Charles to Paris in the summer, and Charles was then ten and a half. He was wearing the blazer and button-down shirt and walking in the streets of Paris when he was accosted by a local American photographer, who wanted to take his picture right there on the street. Charles decided he wouldn't speak a word of English to this guy. He spoke French so well and so long that the man finally said to him, “You're not American, are you?

But what part of France do you come from? I can't spot that accent." And naturally this was the proudest moment of Charles's life.

Q: (laughs) Yes. Well, I would think that Dakar really must have been a constant outdoor life for the boys, for one thing.

KAISER: Yes, although too hot. David wanted to become a track star. The Peace Corps was very important to us there, and the Peace Corps had track stars. David, who is a slight young man and who was not at all built up physically in those days, tried to do a lot of running. But since he had had nephritis we were over-protective perhaps, but I think probably wise, because it wasn't the place to build himself up by exhaustive running. However, he felt that we did wrong by him in not letting him develop. Since he grew up he has become a very sturdy young man and plays both soccer and tennis very well, but he didn't get a real start there.

The Peace Corps people we kept in close touch with, and when one of the girls cut her leg in connection with building a small schoolhouse, it wouldn't heal. We invited her to stay with uwhere she could keep it clean and rest it and keep it elevated. That started a lifelong friendship which, however, is mostly kept going through correspondence, since she's lived in Singapore and now that she's on the West Coast. We entertained the Peace Corps, of course. We visited them at their various projects, admired them in their indomitable efforts to work no matter what the temperature.

Q: My daughter was a Peace Corps volunteer in Togo. We had them in Sierra Leone, too. I agree: I thought they were a great asset to the country. This was really your first introduction to diplomatic life, wasn't it?

KAISER: Yes it was. From there, we went to London. 1961 to 1964 we were in Senegal, and then from 1964 to 1969 we were in London. London is, of course, the most delightful post for any English-speaking person. You just can't have a better time. We had a perfectly lovely house to live in, which had been built, bought by one of our predecessors at the

end of World War II for a song compared to its value today. It was enlivened and made beautiful by the fact of Julius Fleishman, one of the gin family members who came to see us from his yacht when he sailed down the coast of Africa. We got to know him a little bit in Dakar. He talked about his art collection and offered to send us some when we went to England. He sent us about 25 marvelous pictures by American artists, which the British were so interested in seeing. I really miss them to this day. There were things there that were so unusual. They were so delightful that I almost had one of them copied, but I didn't.

Q: So he gave his American paintings to the DCM's residence?

KAISER: He loaned them for our stint. We had them for the whole five years, but they were willed to the Cleveland University at Cincinnati (Ohio). That's where they were willed to and that's where they are today. But we were very lucky, because this was a large house, and we really needed, ate up, pictures. It made the place just terrific.

Q: Who were some of the artists?

KAISER: They were all contemporaries, but I don't believe, unless I can find the list, that I can help you out by telling names now. They aren't that well known to people who aren't collectors of American art. They aren't among the absolutely first-rank, but they are certainly right up there as excellent artists.

Q: And the important thing is that they were American art in one of the American residences.

KAISER: They were very good American art. Really interesting, I think. I think Mr. Fleishman had a good eye and collected wonderful pictures and all sizes, so that we had the two Japanese girls over the fireplace, and the wonderful whale over the couch, and over another couch we had the men who were repairing a very tenuous bridge and looked as though they were going to fall into the water below at any moment. I can still see them, as you see, in my mind's eye.

Well, what was the other thing? Oh, the wives.

Q: Yes, the wives.

KAISER: Yes. The British, in general, are extremely good at organizing committees and organizations to help the underdog. And every year, it was the custom for all the embassies to participate in a fund-raising bazaar to benefit the Save the Children Foundation, which, of course, was a cause that everybody could subscribe to without any trouble.

I was very glad that, when we started, it was taken for granted that the American wives would do their bit, making small scrubbers out of net, starchy net material, and all kinds of things really, but I remember that item as being utterly practical and simple to make. (laughs) It was good for brushing a wool skirt as well as for cleaning a pot. The women were very cooperative, and we did a lot of different things. We had a stall that would make a lot of money. But towards the end of my tour, the new look came into the Foreign Service and the women were not so pleased about working. We had to put it on a much more volunteer basis. People, who wanted to, could be included, but we couldn't ask anybody to do it, because the idea of doing your own thing was becoming “de rigueur.”

And so, it didn't really change things a whole lot. We found different people working in some cases from the group that had worked before. I found it a very sociable time. We'd get together and sew or do things. I remember somebody printed up Queen Elizabeth's cake recipe, the cake that she was supposed to stir together herself in her own kitchen. We sold that for a shilling - the recipe and a taste of the cake. (laughs)

We had a lot of different ideas and we were very successful. It was an enormous operation altogether, because London has a branch of every single embassy, and almost every single one participated. It was great fun, I thought. What else did the wives have to do? We raised a certain amount of money to help a few other causes, and wives also spoke

before women's groups. I haven't thought about it for 20 or 25 years, but there was a group that has branches all over, the Women's something or other, all over the country, and weekly meetings. They would be very happy to have an American come and talk about life in America. I remember doing that a few times myself. It was fun and it got you right next to the people. They were so appreciative that it seemed very worth doing.

I can't remember now what else we did, but even in London we felt it was important to entertain local employees, because we don't want them to feel they are second-class citizens when they live in their own country and work for us. It can happen that they are neglected from the point of view of the ambassador and other officers of the embassy, so we made a real effort to get them over. The ambassador held the annual Christmas parties, and they were always a big success.

Q: Let me ask you about your relationship to Horace Greeley.

KAISER: He's our fifth cousin thrice removed. Someone of my relatives tracked it down.

Q: Somewhere, way back, you have a great, great, great grandfather in common?

KAISER: Right. Five greats, I should think.

Q: Then Robert comes quite honestly by his prowess as a journalist?

KAISER: Right. I think I started to teach on a part time basis when I was still in the embassy. I think three mornings a week we would go to a local public school - our definition of a public school - and teach six- and seven- and eight-year olds, whose first language really was English as spoken in the West Indies and who were not quick readers and who needed that extra help to boost them along. There was a group of four of us ladies who went and did this on a regular, businesslike basis and enjoyed it thoroughly.

Q: So you did take your personal interest, and, of course, it's nice to have an interest like this - what we call, a portable skill, which you can take to almost any country and use it.

KAISER: One of the other joys of being in the Foreign Service is the latitude we're given for decorating the house. There were things that the decorator in the embassy felt should be renewed, and I was allowed to pick out materials and color schemes. It was all very pleasant. I remember thinking of saving the embassy money on the tablecloths for round tables in a big room that we could use for a party with several tables in the ground floor of the house. I had to make huge round tablecloths, and I figured how to make the circle, and so they worked out. I'm sure they were replaced by store-bought ones.

Q: Maybe not. (laughs)

KAISER: But, nevertheless, I was sometimes appalled by the cost of things in the Foreign Service. I felt cutting a few corners was all to the good. That's what growing up in the Depression will do for you. Of course, we did all the usual things in regard to entertaining people, but that can be imagined without much description by me.

Q: You were there with [Ambassador] David Bruce?

KAISER: Yes.

Q: The entire time?

KAISER: Right. And many of the people that were in the embassy with us then we still see to this day. Ron Spiers, who's now the —

Q: He's head of M [Management] at the State Department.

KAISER: He's deputy secretary of state or something. He does a very good job. He was in London with us.

Q: Yes, and he has perhaps not an enviable job at the moment because of cuts and slashes and trying to keep the Department together.

KAISER: Terrible. Terrible. The morale in the Department, I think, has never been lower.

Q: That's what everyone says, and it's very sad, really.

KAISER: It is, but people come home from abroad who expect to become ambassadors, who've served all their apprenticeship, and there's no place to send them, because of the great number of political appointments Reagan has made.

Q: And the political appointments have moved downward in the ranks.

KAISER: Right, and to even small countries. We were replaced in Austria by a chain store grocery owner from California. That type of appointment is really resented by the embassy staff. They know that that person may be rich and maybe generous at entertaining, but the substantive part of the job will not be done well.

Q: I think it's interesting that it's assumed that anyone can be an ambassador.

KAISER: Right. Right.

Q: And you would agree, I think, that you have to develop.

KAISER: It really is a job for a skilled person who knows the art of the possible and has a real appreciation for foreign affairs and how complicated they are. Well, Phil was very good at it. Although he was taken out of the Civil Service, his educational background was such that I have never apologized for his being a political appointee, because he was as good as any career appointment and as qualified. He knew foreign languages and improved what he did know and was a skillful diplomat. He's much more of a diplomat in private life than I am.

Q: In England, too, he must have been able to draw extensively from his experience there as a Rhodes scholar.

KAISER: Oh, certainly. In fact, when we went to London, Roy Jenkins, Dennis Healey and a third one were all at Balliol College when Phil was there and were all in the Labour Government, which had just come to power in England. So Phil had “built-in” Roy Jenkins, Dennis Healey and Ted Heath. They'd all been head of the Common Room, which is the student organization, and Phil had, too. So he had built-in excellent connections with important Britishers.

Q: Invaluable.

KAISER: It was great fun. Harold Wilson had been teaching at Oxford when he was there, so it was invaluable. It made life much more fun.

Q: It must have given you an immediate entr#e —

KAISER: Exactly.

Q: — into an enormous post, which can sometimes be more difficult than having an entr#e with the Senegalese in Dakar, really.

KAISER: Oh, yes. You don't have so much competition-

Q: (laughs) Right.

KAISER: -in Senegal. But he did have an enormously interesting job, because Bruce was much more interested in what went on at the very highest level and he left the running of the embassy to Phil. Phil, I think, was very good at it. People seemed to enjoy working for him.

Q: But that must have been a very nice time for you.

KAISER: Oh, it was a wonderful time. We still go back every summer to see our old friends. We have so many that are really good friends.

So, after five years in the embassy, Annenberg came to be the ambassador. Phil worked for him for five months. It was a different kind of experience. I remember Phil hearing Annenberg say, after they'd called on the Prime Minister, “I'm sorry, but I didn't have time to read a book about England before I came, but I was just so busy.” And Phil said, “Well, I think I could get two or three books together for you now.” And Annenberg said, “Oh, I'll be much too busy now.” So that was the difference in the kind of ambassador that Annenberg would make over David Bruce. Phil was happy to leave.

He went into a private line. He became chairman and managing director of Encyclopedia Britannica for the rest of the time, which was eight years that we spent in London in private life. Then Phil was made ambassador to Budapest, Hungary, by President Johnson. And there Phil masterminded the return of the Crown of St. Stephen, a 1000-year-old symbol of national identity, which was returned by the United States. I guess the effort began in 1978.

Q: It must have been ten years back, because you went to Hungary in 1977, so it probably wasn't returned until 1978.

KAISER: Yes, I think that's what it was, the 10th anniversary. This crown had been in Fort Knox ever since the end of World War II. It was given by some right-wing Hungarian soldiers to Americasoldiers to keep it out of the hands of communists. It was in Fort Knox all that time. Americans of Hungarian descent were opposed to returning it to a communist government, because it is the symbol of a legitimate government. Phil had to do quite a bit of politicking and get support of key congressmen and senators iorder to get that sent back. But he felt, I think rightly, that it wasn't really our crown. We weren't really able to control the kind of government that Hungary had. If we didn't give it back, when it had been out of the country for so long, it wouldn't mean anything when it did get back there,

because the people to whom it really meant something were the older generation who remembered when it was still in Hungary.

It was sent back with a lot of folderol, and Secretary of State Vance came. I remember his wife wore a bright red dress for the ceremony, which being the symbol of communism, the Hungarians didn't really warm to. She was utterly unconscious that it might not be the wisest choice. Muskie (Senator Edmund Muskie, Democrat of Maine, who was in 1980 to replace Cyrus Vance as secretary of state following the Iran hostage crisis) came, too, and it was really a very, very warm occasion. Ever since then, Phil can do no wrong with the Hungarians. He also helped them get Most Favored Nation status in trade, so that was very helpful.

And Hungary...our embassy is not a very big, pretentious house, but it is just the perfect house for a country of that size with so many people living in tiny apartments. It was a real treat for the Hungarians to come there. They just loved it. They were always lined up in front of the front door and all the way down the hill, waiting for the exact moment the party was announced. They would come in the minute the party was announced. Nobody was ever late in Hungary. You had to plan on that.

The Fourth of July party we could hold in our big garden in front of the house, and it was also a very pleasant and easy occasion. We could have American small hamburgers and tiny hot dogs to give it a real American touch. This year, I'm told that “health food” has taken over the reception — raw vegetables without any dips were served. I'm sure the Hungarians were flabbergasted, because food is very important to them. I think the occasion was saved by the presence of a Dairy Queen ice cream truck, because ice cream cones, although it isn't the best ice cream in the world, was at least very acceptable, especially to the children.

Q: So this is one time that ice cream worked instead of backfiring as it did with your mother. (laughs)

KAISER: I really felt sad that raw vegetables without any dips were served, because who's going to eat raw vegetables without dip? It really isn't very interesting.

Q: But you had no problems in Hungary, even though it's a communist government. The people came to your receptions. There was no wariness as there was to be in Moscow and Poland?

KAISER: There was some wariness, but only on the part of people at the very highest levels, who perhaps were engaged in atomic research, something like that. I can only remember, really, one couple who didn't want to be invited to the embassy. Then we met a marvelous gardener, who was just outside the city, and he told us frankly that he would never come to the embassy, because he was so affronted that he had to have the invitation vetted as local communists do. He thought that was such an indignity that he just told us, “I'll never come, because I refuse to go through that.” But he would invite us to his place, and we saw his garden. He had concerts in the summer in his little enclave, which we enjoyed very much. He was a wonderful person. We really loved the Hungarians. They're extremely intelligent, outgoing, warm. They love humor, as you saw in that thing I wrote up. They had many stories circulating all the time to make the Russian influence more palatable — not that they ever felt it was completely palatable, but they knew better than to say anything.

Q: I wanted to ask you one other thing about Hungary....the difference in being an ambassador's wife in the 1960's, when you had more control over who you could ask to help, and in Hungary, when they helped as volunteers... Did that really present a problem?

KAISER: In Hungary, the whole outlook on life, the way things were organized, was suitable for a communist country, and the volunteer aspect of society hardly existed. They didn't have outfits for helping the blind or the lame.

Q: Excuse me, I was thinking about your relationship with the women in the embassy.

KAISER: Well, the women in the embassy I didn't need to ask to do things, except for people in the embassy, because the communist world doesn't look for help in social work of any sort.

Q: Especially not from the American embassy women!

KAISER: Right. And so our time was spent trying to keep our local employees happy and trying to get them, even if they were Hungarians, to the embassy a few times a year. They were enormously appreciative and liked very much the time we were there, I know.

My own household help were keen to learn more English, and I would gather them around the dining room table as often as possible and give them an English lesson. They were just thrilled with that. Unfortunately, the Hungarians are more status-conscious than in some other countries. I think all of Eastern Europe is more status-conscious than we are, and the idea that the ambassador's wife would teach them English was just heady stuff. (laughs) Of course, to me, it seemed a perfectly natural thing to do. I enjoyed it. And the cook spoke extremely good English. They all really learned more. I even got the gardeners in, but the gardeners are not born intellectuals. (laughs) They didn't make a lot of progress, but the others did and enjoyed it. I gave them materials, and they were thrilled to receive a present. It worked out.

One time at Thanksgiving, we had a Thanksgiving dinner and invited a lot of Hungarians. We had a total of 60 guests at round tables. During Thanksgiving, it snowed. The house was on a hill. It was perhaps a hundred feet from the road, and they had to walk down through the snow to their cars. So I asked the butler if he would do something about it, and he said, “Well, it's the gardeners' job and they're not here today. It's a holiday.”

So I said, “Well, give me the shovel.” I shoveled the snow away, and the Hungarians were simply flabbergasted that the ambassador's wife was doing it. They all looked at me with great astonishment and some amusement. I, having grown up in Madison, Wisconsin, felt

this was just what you do when it snows. I love the snow, so it got done. They were able to walk home fairly dry-footed.

Q: (laughs) Then you went from there to Vienna?

KAISER: Yes, we went from there to Vienna. And Phil, being a Kaiser, was told by the local bishop that it was the first time in a 1000 years that a Kaiser was sent to Vienna instead of the other way around. (Fenzi laughs) Vienna was much more status-conscious. The titles that people have of royalty were supposed to be dead after World War I, but they are still alive and well, and people use the titles. The pecking order is a well-established thing in Vienna, which we didn't warm to so much, but we had to accept it as part of the scenery. The house is much more pretentious and has a formal garden and a very, nice big garden where you can have the Fourth of July. My husband added a tennis court. In fact, he added a tennis court in Budapest as well. It's very important to get your exercise. He got a beautiful tennis court built in each place. I guess there was one in Vienna, we just got it fixed up better, I don't think we had to put it in there. Only to start from scratch in Budapest.

There were do-good outfits in Vienna, but by this time, the embassy wives were thoroughly in control of their own lives. I don't remember organizing to do good works in Vienna. Of course, there is quite a language barrier. Not everybody in the embassy spoke German. However, the Viennese were very good about speaking English, and in many, many cases, they spoke very good English, so conversation could continue very nicely.

There was a big American school. There was a small American school in Budapest as well and of course I took an interest in that. The big American school in Vienna was very successful, and some foreigners' children attended it in preference to the German-sponsored schools that are really so different. Their attitude toward children - and this is true of the French as well - is that the children are bad until proved otherwise. The idea that you treat them as little human beings, almost like adults, is thoroughly an American

idea and not exportable. But that's why the American school is so popular with American children. They want to be treated like young people who know where they're going and who aren't wrong until proved otherwise.

Q: Or until they become 19 or whatever. (laughs)

KAISER: Right.

Q: So, in Vienna, the American family program to hire wives had been put into effect, had it?

KAISER: Yes.

Q: You had women working in the embassy?

KAISER: Yes, in the embassy. I think Sue Low was working on the Foreign Service Associates idea as early as Dakar. She was trying. And she really did a lot of work on drawing up job specifications for the jobs in the embassy and trying to figure out a way to employ more of the wives, which I think now happens.

Vienna is a very affluent society. People are very rich and very comfortable. There didn't seem to be any real call for our doing social work, but entertaining took on a special dimension, partly because Leonard Bernstein came there often. He came for one concert which included his own Mass and also an opera that he had written. It was an extremely happy occasion.

The Austrians love Leonard, just the way we do. We had a party for his cast, a group from the chorus came and sang some of the songs, and many people in the Opera House hierarchy came, along with social types. It was an extremely happy occasion, one that is especially now memorable for Chrislene Petropolus, who lived with us for about a year while she was studying singing at the Vienna Opera House. She's a young woman of Greek parentage, who is American, and her family lives in Potomac (Maryland). She was

very worried about being unprotected in Vienna, among all those “wolves”, as she would put it, and she lived with us before shfound housing that seemed adequate and that she could afford. She also sang for us and gave a concert, and people were very warm about her.

Arthur Schwarz, the great piano composer of “Bandwagon” and several other musicals and many, many songs — “Dancing in the Dark”, I think was his — also came and put on a concert in the [official] residence. People still talk about it when we see old friends who were there at that time. Of course, Vienna gets more Americans. Wherever you are stationed, you get a certain number of Americans all the time, coming over for one reason or another. We had a great many in Vienna and we enjoyed entertaining them and inviting their old friends from Vienna to come too. It gave you a good springboard for any party that you wanted to give. There was never any lack of springboards for parties when we were in Vienna, I think. My husband says I was good at helping maintain high morale in the embassy, where again, we did make an effort to get the local employees over as much as possible.

That seems to me about the end. Can't think of anything else.

Q: If we could talk for a few more minutes, tell me more about this program that you went to.

KAISER: The Radcliffe...?

Q: The precursor of the Harvard Business School for women at Radcliffe.

KAISER: I'm going to find that thing that I can give you. My stepmother at one point was the dean of women at the University of Wisconsin, and I was working in Chicago two years after I graduated when she went to a meeting of deans of women and heard about the program that Radcliffe College wanted to start to help young women break into business employment at the height of the Depression.

Q: And this is 19...?

KAISER: And Edith Steadman was the head of the appointment bureau. This was 1937. She told about her program, and my stepmother spoke up and said, “That's just the thing for my stepdaughter Hannah. I think she'd be very good at that.” It ended by my going there as one of the original class of five, who have just celebrated their 50th anniversary at Radcliffe along with everybody else who had been involved in the course who wanted to come. There was a group of around 200 women who came in the fall, in October, to memorialize the course and talk about what we had done since then.

I was the only one of the five who married and had children and had a career in diplomacy. Two of them married late in life and one of them never married. One of them was married at a reasonable age, but never had any children and worked at Wellesley College in their appointment bureau. So I had a certain amount of difference from the rest of them, especially with a diplomatic career. They asked everyone to write a small thing about their lives, and to my astonishment, they printed every word of mine in this.

We had speeches from a lot of people who'd made it successfully. I was most impressed with a black girl who had had an unusual upbringing and been protected from race prejudice by her father by first growing up in Georgia and then moving to a small community in Virginia to escape the Ku Klux Klan. He had successfully protected them by standing at his door at night with a gun to make sure the KKK stayed away and he didn't want to tell his family about it. He didn't want them to know what they were up against. He just moved them out to Virginia. She was a most unusual young woman, who now owns two McDonalds in Los Angeles about two miles apart on some main street there. It's a very competitive business and a very hard business, and she has made a success of it. All McDonalds are on leases.

Q: Franchises.

KAISER: Franchises, thank you. She has a long franchise now, as long as she wants, and is an extremely successful young woman. And other people have made it in widely varying places in corporate life to, raising grapes and having a vineyard and producing wine and practically everything in between; from the more expected things, working in government or employment offices, to being on corporate boardOne of the girls in my group is Winifred Quick. She was the first woman director of the WAVES in World War II, and she became a captain in the Navy. She is now Winifred Collins. She married an admiral, who unfortunately died about two years ago of cancer, but she had a very successful, late marriage. She has been on the board of several very impressive companies and reports that she herself has become an investment expert and has made over a million dollars in the stock market. She has now established some scholarship help for young women trying to get through a business course or some other education in order to make it in the modern world. She is helping a Chinese girl at MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), whom she is thrilled about. So you can see this course has spun off in several directions and very successfully.

Q: And was this a meeting that you went to?

KAISER: Yes, it was a reunion.

Q: Just this year, your 50th? Well, I would like to look at that.

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BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Date spouse entered Service: 1961Left Service: 1981

Present status:Spouse of retired ambassador

Posts: 1961Dakar, Senegal and Mauritania 1964London, England 1977Budapest, Hungary 1980Vienna, Austria

Date/place of birth: August 3, 1913, Simsbury, Connecticut

Parents:

Father: Dr. Hugh R Greeley, medical doctor, Harvard

Mother: Florella Elmore (from Milwaukee, attended Radcliffe)

Stepmother: Louise Troxell, Dean of Women, University of Wisconsin

Maiden name: Hannah Greeley (Horace Greeley distant relative)

Education:

University of Wisconsin social services

University of Chicago, social services

Radcliffe, Business program

American University, teaching certificate

Profession: Teacher (English), diplomat's wife

Date/place of marriage: June 17, 1939, Oxford, England

Children:

Robert (editor of The Washington Post, spouse also named Hannah)

David

Charles